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Breastfeeding Kentucky

Kentucky Celebrates Breastfeeding Awareness Month

Going for the Gold with Peer Counselors

August is Breastfeeding Awareness Month in Kentucky, and the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) has declared August 1-7 as World Breastfeeding Week.

This year's theme is "Mother Support: Going for the Gold". Throughout the month, health agencies have organized many activities promoting and supporting breastfeeding in Kentucky, such as the Rock and Relax Room at the Kentucky State Fair.

An ongoing project of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services is the Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program. This program provides support and information for prenatal and breastfeeding mothers.

The Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program, operated through local health departments, provides one-on-one counseling, information and round-the-clock guidance for mothers new to breastfeeding. The United States Department of Agriculture funds the program through a grant. The Program is available to participants of the WIC Program.

"Our health departments select peer counselors based on enthusiasm for breastfeeding and a willingness to share their experience and knowledge with other mothers," said Angela Ratliff, state Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Coordinator. "We use counselors who want to help other mothers enjoy a positive and successful experience with breastfeeding." A breastfeeding peer counselor is a current or former WIC participant with personal breastfeeding experience.

Peer counseling services in Kentucky are offered at the areas served by the following health departments: Allen County, Gateway District, Green River District, Kentucky River District, Louisville Metro, Marshall County, and Northern Kentucky Independent District. This summer the Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program is expanding to include Barren River District, Boyle County, Powell County, WEDCO District, Laurel County, and Greenup County.

Shana Hensley, West Liberty, has been a counselor with the program for almost a year, and has worked with around 140 clients. As the mother of 2-year-old twins, she said she needed some guidance learning to breastfeed her own children and wanted to share the knowledge she gained with other mothers.

"A lot of women think breastfeeding is an old-fashioned thing. It's unheard of for some," said Hensley. "Some clients don't realize that breastfeeding is something you can get help for. If more women knew what it does for kids, everyone would do it."

Peer counselors' services have proven to be a significant factor in improving breastfeeding initiation and duration rates among women, including the economically disadvantaged and populations of diverse cultural backgrounds and geographical locations.

Peer counselors are effective in communities where role models for breastfeeding behaviors, knowledgeable health care providers and cultural practices that include breastfeeding as a norm are scarce.

"Among the most powerful attributes is the ability of Breastfeeding Peer Counselors to provide ongoing support and practical suggestions for breastfeeding that are modeled on their own life experiences," said Ratliff. "The Program is providing a wonderful service to new mothers who often just need some encouragement to continue to breastfeed their infants."

The peer counselors work with their local WIC agency to provide support to breastfeeding moms and families in their region and have started "Mother to Mother" support groups for their communities.

For more information about this program, contact Angela Ratliff at angela.ratliff@ky.gov or by phone at (502) 564-3827, ext. 4512.



Rock and Relax at the State Fair!

Since 1991 mothers and babies have enjoyed the "Rock and Relax" Room at the Kentucky State Fair. This service is co-sponsored by Baptist Hospital East and the Louisville Metro Health Department.

The "Rock and Relax" Room provides mothers with a private place to feed, change and rock their babies while raising awareness of the health benefits of breastfeeding.

In addition to the financial support provided by Baptist East and the Louisville Metro Health



Department, Babies R Us loans new glider rockers to use in the rocking area each year. The staffing is provided by personnel from local health departments, the state health department and Baptist East with approximately 50 volunteers putting in over 300 hours. Health experts are available to answer questions about breastfeeding and parenting.



The Kentucky State Fair begins August 14 and continues through August 24 at Louisville's Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center. This year Rock and Relax will be located in South Wing B as part of "Kidz Biz".



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